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**COMMISSION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OCTOBER 2016 MEETING**

**Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs Meeting.** The [Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs](#) met on October 5, 2016, at the Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown.

**Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Update.**

- Executive Director Robert King recently retired. Mr. Bob Steben is acting as Interim Executive Director until the Governor names a replacement.
- The Attorney General's Office has been receiving complaints and investigating "pension poachers" who charge exorbitant fees for helping veterans apply for benefits. County Veteran Affairs Commissioners in all 99 counties, as well as federally chartered veterans service organizations, will help veterans apply for these benefits free of charge. The Private Providers of Veterans Benefit Services Disclosure Act ([2015 Iowa Acts chapter 74](#)) requires that private providers of these services disclose this information to veterans and includes a civil penalty.
- Erosion problems have begun occurring at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery. Services have been contracted to fix this.

**Iowa Veterans Home Update.** The Director provided an update on infrastructure projects, recent donations, and the current waiting list. The Veterans Home recently received a positive review from the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Veterans Trust Fund Update.** Commission Chair Dan Gannon pointed out that next month's meeting for the Trust Fund will review an unusually high number of individual applications at 34, totaling nearly \$64,000 in requests for assistance. Applications for assistance usually total between 20 and 25 per month. The Trust Fund is still currently making awards in all 17 categories of assistance.

**Veterans Council Coalition's 2017 Legislative Priorities.** The Commission voted to support the Iowa Veterans Council Coalition's 2017 legislative priorities. These four requests include:

- Fully funding all state veteran-related programs.
- Waiving the motor vehicle registration fee for one personal vehicle for veterans with a 50.0% or greater service-connected disability rating.
- Increasing the Military Property Tax Exemption from \$1,852 to \$3,700.
- Observing the POW/MIA flag protocol established in the U.S. General Services Administration's [Federal Management Regulations Bulletin 2008-B6](#) on six federal holidays. The protocol requires the POW/MIA flag to be flown below the United States flag and above the State of Iowa flag.

**Presentation.** Mr. Tony Smithhart, Director of Veteran Employment and Training Services at the U.S. Department of Labor, and Ms. Linda Rouse, Veterans Program Manager at Iowa Workforce Development, gave an overview of employment programs and other policies related to veterans.

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Updates.** There were updates given on the following areas:

- Medical Center in Des Moines. Director Gail Greene has been on the job for about three months. The new emergency room has opened, and a new clinic in Knoxville will be open by mid-January. The Fort Dodge clinic was previously run by UnityPoint Health, but the hospital is ending that contract, and the VA Medical Center will be taking over staffing and operations of that clinic soon. The Medical Center is also working with the VA Benefits Administration to co-locate exams and clinical staff into the Administration office. The relocation is expected to take place this month.
- Medical Center in Iowa City. Brian Clarke, Public Affairs Officer, informed the Commission about the Center's two-to-five-year strategic plan, infrastructure updates taking place, and the opening of a new office in Davenport to co-locate chronic homelessness and intensive substance abuse treatment

services in order to increase effectiveness and capacity. Additionally, the new eight-bay operating area will be opening this month, after which the old operating room will close for renovation.

**Next Meeting.** The next meeting will be held on January 4, 2017, at the Gold Star Museum at Camp Dodge in Johnston, IA.

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